

Egyptian surround sound systems were particularly good.



CLEOPATRA: SPECIAL EDITION

BUY IT FOR...

- CLEOPATRA'S BIG ENTRANCE INTO ROME
- BURTON'S CHEST, LIZ'S FACE
- THE SUPERB DOCUMENTARY

DETAILS

RRP \$49.95 **RATING** M **YEAR** 1963
DIRECTOR JOSEPH L. MANKIEWICZ
STARRING ELIZABETH TAYLOR, RICHARD BURTON, REX HARRISON
PICTURE WIDESCREEN ANAMORPHIC 2.35:1
SOUND DOLBY DIGITAL 5.1

THE FILM

JULIUS CAESAR (HARRISON) LOOKS AND ACTS LIKE A MIDDLE MANAGER for the Roman Empire visiting their branch office in Egypt. You can tell by his accent that he's been educated at Oxford-On-The-Tiber and by his manner that he's a wily tactician who has seen a few battles and settled old scores.

In town for a visit with Cleopatra (Taylor) and her brother Ptolemy (Richard O'Sullivan before *Man About The House*) Caesar finds the siblings have been fighting. Luckily, his stern jaw and sensible management approach puts things right. What old Julius doesn't realise is that Cleopatra will use her "womanly ways" to get what she wants and pretty soon Ptolemy is out of the picture and Caesar is "in love."

Everything is going fine until Marc Antony (Burton) shows up while Caesar

is back in Rome handling some accounting problems. True love blossoms - both on and off screen, this was the film where Burton and Taylor first met - and battle plans are drawn up against various foes. Young lovers! You just can't leave them to run an empire.

That's pretty much the entire story of *Cleopatra* over its four long hours - love, treachery, betrayal, huge special effects and massive crowd scenes. At \$44(US) million it was one of the biggest budget movies made at the time and very nearly brought 20th Century Fox to financial ruin.

The credits say that the script is by the director and a couple of other guys - George Bernard Shaw and some bloke called Bill Shakespeare (uncredited). It's a classic love triangle with only two of the participants truly in love.

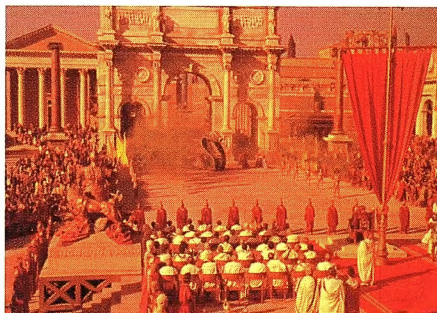
Although the mammoth length of the film drags, the script is actually quite good and the cod-period dialogue is delivered with gusto. Taylor and Burton are great, while Harrison sets the benchmark for Patrick Stewart and other aspiring accountants.

The direction could be generously described as "European" - its pace so grindingly slow you'll need several stiff drinks to get through the whole thing in one sitting. But as a period piece (we're talking 1960s AD not BC) this is a time capsule of vintage film making like no other. Just be sure to pack supplies.

THE DISC

■ **PICTURE:** Restored from its 70mm cinema release, *Cleopatra* looks like a true epic. Leon Shamoy's cinematography is crisp and clear and the DVD transfer is flawless.

CLEOPATRA: THE FILM THAT CHANGED HOLLYWOOD



CLEOPATRA: *The Film That Changed Hollywood* is that rarest feature of DVD bonus material – a real documentary that tells its story warts and all. Narrated by Robert Culp, the doco traces the epic from its roots as a low budget quickie using a silent movie script through to the most expensive Hollywood film ever made (until *Heaven's Gate*) at a staggering \$44 million in 1964.

The producer Walter Wanger had done four years in prison for shooting his wife's lover in the groin. Out of the big house, Wanger teamed up with 20th Century Fox to create an instant movie and screen tested a host of Hollywood actresses, including Joan Collins and Joanne Woodward, for the role of Cleo.



Realising that things could be so much bigger, Wanger convinced the studio execs to spend big and get the best, eventually snaring Taylor for the then unheard of cost of \$1 (US) million (plus expenses).

A false start with Peter Finch as Caesar shot in London with director Rouben Mamoulian was canned after wasting \$7 (US) million. Joseph L. Mankiewicz was brought in and quickly proclaimed everything done thus far a "garish nightmare".

Two years later and with the film not finished, 20th Century Fox was on the brink of bankruptcy and a very public extra-marital affair between Burton and Taylor meant the future looked very bleak indeed for



Cleopatra. With veterans of the production still around to tell their stories and an array of priceless archive footage, *Cleopatra: The Film That Changed Hollywood* is an excellent documentary that tells all these stories and much more.

It also sets the record straight. Sure, *Cleopatra* made only \$24 (US) million on its release but it went on to recoup its huge budget many times over taking more than \$5 (US) million a year for the rest of the 1960s in America alone, not to mention the overseas sales and television rights.

This is an outstanding documentary and well worth the price of the DVD alone. Highly recommended.

"TAYLOR AND BURTON ARE GREAT, WHILE HARRISON SETS THE BENCHMARK FOR OTHER ASPIRING ACCOUNTANTS"



Now, that's an entrance!



"Has anyone seen my pet leopard?"

■ **SOUND:** The mix is mighty weird – actors talk to each other from the opposite ends of the stereo separation, a bow is drawn in the right speaker and the arrow hits on the left – and the music is clichéd and badly dated. Despite these quirks, the sound restoration on the DVD matches the picture for clarity.

■ **DOCUMENTARY:** *The Film That Changed Hollywood* (see *Feature Focus*).

■ **THE FOURTH STAR OF CLEOPATRA:** Produced by a desperate 20th Century Fox publicity department, this is total old school cheese. A breathless,

alliterative and ridiculously over-the-top voice-over trumpets the arrival of a classic. "A fabulous film about a fabulous woman," says the voice-over man. You're inclined not to believe in its fabulousness just because of that.

■ **TRAILERS:** Five trailers. The first are sneaks released while the film was in production with a crawling text announcing that reserved seats are now available. "Inquire at the box office!" The third is the full-blown dialogue and action scene version for the full release. The last two are

completely hilarious French and Portuguese versions.

■ **MOVIE TONE NEWS CLIPS:** Two vintage studio-produced newsreels covering the opening of the movie in New York, Los Angeles and Washington D.C. Notable by their absence are Taylor and Burton. But Roddy McDowell and Rex Harrison show up to all three premieres as do a host of B-grade nobodies, assorted politicians and wives and the President of South Vietnam. A brief but fascinating time capsule.

■ **PHOTO GALLERY:** Extensive

still gallery with behind-the-scenes photos, costume sketches, concept art and more.

ANDREW FROST

IS IT WORTH IT?

This is the definitive four hour version as it was released in 1963. It looks great and sounds good. What else do you need?

